

The disciples were doubtless on their way home from the Synagogue morning service. The rabbinical law allowed no eating on the Sabbath until this service was over. Mark tells us that they "began to make their way plucking the ears of corn" (R. V. Marg.) This has led some to suppose that they were clearing a way for themselves by tearing off the heads of grain (Meyer) while Christ simply pushed the stalks aside. Others suggest that the grain overhung the narrow pathway, and the disciples opened a passage for themselves. (Lindsay.) As they did so they plucked the grain.

But there seems to have been quite a crowd along with Christ and his disciples. The road must have been something more than a narrow foot path obliterated by luxuriant grain. There is no necessity for these strained explanations. The phrase "to mark their way" means simply, as with us, "to pursue their journey."

It was lawful to pluck standing grain to satisfy hunger (Deut. 23 : 25.) Dr. Thomson says "I have often seen my muleteers, as we passed along the wheat-fields pluck off the ears, rub them in their hands, and eat the grain, unroasted, just as the apostles are said to have done."

2.—The Pharisees now followed Christ more as spies than as learners. They were on the watch to catch him in his speech, or conduct. The disciples had violated no law of the Bible, but the precepts of the Mosaic institutions had been extended by the addition of minute regulations designed to guard against the possibility of transgression. These "traditions of the elders" often "made void the law," by over straining its terms and so destroying its spirit and frustrating its intention.

In the present case they regarded the plucking and eating of grain as equivalent to reaping and threshing. Or it may be that it appeared to be the preparation of food, which was unlawful, on the ground that manna did not fall on the Sabbath (Ex. 16: 22.) The Pharisees thought it better for the disciples to remain hungry for a few hours than to violate a rabbinical precept.

Some of these precepts may be given, as illustrations of the spirit of Sabbatism rebuked by our Lord. "In walking outside of a

walled town not even a handkerchief could be carried in the pocket, for that would be a burden. Shoes must be worn without nails, since these were not necessary, and would require some additional exertion. No flower could be plucked or fruit picked; not even those that fall to the ground could be used." Yet for all these, trivial and puerile as they seem to us, the Sabbath is to the devout Jew a day of holy joy.

3.—From the narrative in 1 Sam. 21: 6, we learn that hot bread had been placed on the table the day that David arrived, which must, therefore, have been Sabbath (Lev. 24: 8.) The example is thus doubly appropriate.

Bengel supposes that this was the synagogue lesson for that day, and so it stands in modern Hebrew lectionaries, but this arrangement of Scripture readings cannot be proved to have been followed in our Saviour's time. Christ lays the stress of his argument upon the hunger which compelled David to take the shewbread. "All laws of positive institution, deriving their obligation solely from the fact that they are commanded, and not from their own essential moral character, must be accommodated to circumstances from their very nature, and must yield to the necessity of obeying higher laws." The higher law is that of self preservation.

4.—The tabernacle was then at Nob, an eminence not far from Jerusalem. In Luke it is said that this took place "in the days of Abiathar the high priest." But it was Abimelech, the father of Abiathar, who gave David the shew bread.

No explanation of this difficulty is entirely satisfactory, but the most reasonable seems to be that Abiathar was associated with his father, as afterwards with Zadok, and as high-priest in the reign of David, was a more famous man than he, and so the period is marked by his name.

The "shew bread" was twelve loaves of unleavened bread, one for each tribe, which stood on a table in the Holy Place. The name literally means "Bread of the Presence" because it was placed before the Lord as the emblem of all that sustained life, and a token of the covenant between God and his people (Lev. 24: 3; John 6: 32-35, 48-51.) It was renewed every Sabbath day, and the stale bread was to be eaten by the priest only, and in